

Legislation Text

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Also naming Bainbridge Street, between 8th and 9th Streets, as “Henry L. Phillips Way”.

WHEREAS, Henry L. Phillips was born in Jamaica in 1847. He moved to New York City and was a lay reader at St. Philip’s Church before enrolling in the Philadelphia Divinity School in 1872. Rev. Phillips was ordained to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church in 1875 and briefly had charge of St. Thomas Church near 5th and Walnut Streets before becoming the Rector of the Church of the Crucifixion that he transformed into a black cultural center that was known for its social outreach; and

WHEREAS, The same year that he had charge of St. Thomas Fr. Phillips married Sarah “Sallie” Elizabeth Cole the daughter of an old distinguished St. Thomas family. Supposedly, Rev. Phillips first spied Sallie as she sang in the St. Thomas’ choir. Sallie Phillips was known as a “church worker in the largest sense.” She was “beloved of the old and helpless, efficient in details and rummage sales, foremost in guilds and classes, and the genius of the embroidery class.” It was said that “As wife, mother, church worker and friend Sarah Elizabeth Phillips belonged to the elect”; and

WHEREAS, Fr. Phillips recalled that “he began his first service at [St. Thomas] promptly at 10.30 am, only to be told by the organist afterwards that he should have waited until she played a voluntary when there were enough people in the congregation for the service to start.” Fr. Phillips said that “his ... training could not accept such a practice and the congregation happily accepted services that started on time thereafter”; and

WHEREAS, After leaving St. Thomas, Fr. Phillips became the rector of the Church of the Crucifixion where he organized a Coal Club, a Free Ice Fund, a Home for the Homeless, and a Penitentiary Service that reached out to Moyamensing Jail and Eastern State Penitentiary; and

WHEREAS, In 1903, Dr. Du Bois was at Atlanta University and had just completed his influential report on the Negro Church. In it he referred to Fr. Phillips saying “... the Negro priest of longest service in the Episcopal Church is one of the most valuable social reformers of the day, the Rev. H[enry] L[aird] Phillips of Philadelphia”; and

WHEREAS, He began his ministry at the Crucifixion Mission on South 8th Street. It became one of the leading churches in the nation for its social programs, which included the creation of the first penny savings bank for Negroes in the United States; the expansion and growth of the Home for the Homeless, the only facility of its kind in the city for destitute women and children of both races and the first Philadelphia gymnasium for Blacks out of which grew the Christian Street YMCA. He was later appointed Archdeacon for Colored Work for the Episcopal Diocese of PA. He celebrated his 100th birthday in March 1947; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That Bainbridge Street, between 8th Street and 9th Street in the City of Philadelphia, shall henceforth also be known as “Henry L. Phillips Way”.